

1973, 1974 and 1975 but did not see any Yellow-nosed Mollymawks during that time. Perhaps this species is going to occur more regularly in the Bay of Plenty.

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UNUSUAL BEHAVIOUR OF ASIATIC WHIMBREL

For a number of seasons we have had opportunities to observe the behaviour of whimbrels, both Asiatic (*Numenius variegatus*) and American (*Numenius hudsonicus*), in the Ashley River estuary, Canterbury. These birds are usually found attached to groups of Bar-tailed Godwits (*Limosa lapponica*) and are both alert and shy, often being the first birds to move off at the approach of intruders. When put up they frequently emit a single muted rippling call of six or seven notes but are normally silent when feeding or resting on high-tide roosts. Our records show that on several occasions whimbrels have arrived in August, right at winter's end and before the arrival of godwits. In the 1979-80 season, the only Asiatic Whimbrel to stay in the area was a large specimen, probably a female, not distinctly marked but with a definite brownish plumage and rather dark overall. Its behaviour was normal, that is, as described above. Our last sighting of this bird was in late December, and its place was taken by a smaller, greyer and more distinctly barred Asiatic Whimbrel with an unusually aggressive behaviour pattern and different dietary habits.

Although this whimbrel also roosts with godwits, we have noticed that as soon as the falling tide exposes its chosen feeding bank, it starts to strut about, chasing off any godwit approaching the area. Sometimes it flies in sustained pursuit of an intruding godwit, meanwhile calling persistently with series after series of harshly sounded sequences. On one occasion, when a godwit stood its ground and faced the whimbrel, the latter crouched almost cat-like with body flattened and wings outspread, head and bill raised and uttering a different set of calls quite unlike the ripple sequence and pitched more deeply. Again on another occasion, when the whimbrel was forced to concede ground several times at short intervals at the approach of a number of persons, it stalked around at a safe distance uttering its rippling call every few tens of seconds, then flew into the air screaming harshly and much more loudly than we have previously experienced. It flew north for about a mile, circled another site several times, then returned to stand on an elevated shingle bank overlooking its feeding territory. When this was clear, the whimbrel flew across and resumed feeding.

We have observed no interaction, apart from with godwits, between the whimbrel and any other species of bird encountered on its feeding territory, namely Pied Stilts (*Himantopus leucocephalus*),

Red-billed Gulls (*Larus novaehollandiae*), Black-billed Gulls (*L. bulleri*) Banded Dotterels (*Charadrius bicinctus*).

Whimbrels have been observed feeding in dry areas, picking lightly at surface prey and in wet areas probing like godwits, but this is the first whimbrel we have seen consistently catching and eating crabs, which it removes from the immediate site of capture then proceeds to crush, in the course of which the crab may be dropped two or three times before being swallowed. The bird has frequently taken half a dozen crabs in as many minutes, also marine worms and other prey too small to be identified.

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BROWN BOOBIES IN NEW ZEALAND

While doing a beach patrol on a stretch of Muriwai Beach on the Auckland west coast with Jane Wells and Kathie Parkinson on 6 April 1980, I found a Brown Booby (*Sula leucogaster*) which had been dead for about a week. Distinctive features when compared with an immature Australasian Gannet (*Sula bassana serrator*) were the smaller size, yellow feet, the smooth brown upper plumage, the underwing pattern of white with broad chocolate-brown margins, and the sharp line of demarcation between the brown breast and the brown-smudged white underparts. This colouring of the underparts showed the bird to be immature. Measurements were: culmen 103.2 mm, tarsus 52.5 mm, mid-toe and claw 92.3 mm, wing 440 mm.

Brown Boobies have been reported many times around New Zealand. One is known to have frequented the Hauraki Gulf for three consecutive seasons and to have roosted with Gannets on Horuhoru, and one visited Wellington Harbour in late summer 1975 (Sibson *et al.*, *A New Guide to the Birds of New Zealand* 1979). The most southerly record is just south of Timaru (Pierce 1969, *Notornis* 16: 125).

The first specimen collected was shot in Napier Harbour in July 1884 (Hamilton 1888, *Trans. Proc. NZ Inst.* 21: 128-134). A further two specimens were found more recently and deposited in the National Museum. Details are: NMNZ 8775, an immature bird found by M. Bull, Otaki Beach, 18 May 1957; NMNZ 18704, an immature in moult found by H. J. McCredie, Worsler Bay, Wellington, 20 June 1975 (J. A. Bartle, pers. comm.).

The first Brown Booby recorded in the OSNZ Beach Patrol scheme was found on Te Werahi Beach, near Cape Reinga, on 17 January 1971 (C. R. Veitch, *Notornis*, this issue) by T. R. Harty, and is now in the National Museum (NMNZ 16058). The bird we found is therefore the second recorded in the Beach Patrol Scheme and the fifth specimen obtained in New Zealand. It is now a skeleton in Auckland Museum (Av. 10).

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